

## Chapter I

### DEATH AT GANKWE

**W**E HAD not thought to come upon death on our first night in the Suriname bush. What had killed Sedefo's brother no one could as yet say, for the time had not come to call upon the spirit of the dead man to speak. Death, said the Bush Negroes, was ravaging the family. Kunu, the law of retribution, the tool of ancestors and gods, had found this latest victim an easy prey to the black magic which had been invoked against him. In whispers they talked about a quarrel at work with a man who had a powerful snake god. [54]

"The man's family kunu and the enemy's Aboma god," we heard as a refrain to the low muttering.

There would be dancing all that night for the spirit of the dead, the natives told us, and they asked if we did not wish to come and honor the dead. But an old man objected. "Let them wait until tomorrow," he said, "let them wait until they are rested. To face the spirit of the dead their own spirits must be strong." [609]

That night whenever we stirred in our sleep we strained for the sound of the drums, but the wind blew from the east, and though Gankwe, where the dead man lay in state, was but a ten-minute run down the rapids, we could hear nothing. In the morning, however, we heard them plainly, heard the invocations drummed by the grave diggers on their way to the burial ground deep in the bush on the opposite bank.

*Osio tintin*  
*Osio be'e dyo.*

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[P. 2 contain no textual material]

# REBEL DESTINY

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535 gratulate the dancer, while another had taken her place in the dance, only to be brought to herself again when her dancing had become so abandoned that there was danger of falling or tripping. For it is always a bad thing for one's *akra*—soul—to fall from exhaustion or even to trip while dancing, and it would have been especially dangerous to have fallen with the spirit of the dead so close.

[714] As time passed, figures were seen edging away into the darkness. The knot of dancers thinned. Now there were but two young women dancing. They wore identical cloths of a new material, a pattern resembling the cloth over the coffin. They were related to the dead man. When all were wearied, they had to go on dancing. . . . Dawn would not be long in coming.

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761 We knew that it would not be long before the spirit of the dead would be called upon to tell his family, fellow villagers, and clansmen how death had come upon him. For, in the Guiana bush, except for the very old, there is little natural dying. The deceased has been killed either by the gods whom he has offended or by the black magic of a powerful enemy, and it is of this which he must tell before his burial. When Sedefo came to our camp the next afternoon, we asked him about the "carrying of the corpse," as the ceremony is called. We told him that his people in Africa— for the Bush Negroes know that their origins are African— also asked the spirit of the dead why death had come upon him, and we plied him with questions. What would they do to be sure the answer was right? Who would ask the questions? When would they establish the facts of the killing? And might we come and see?

There would be no trouble, he told us amiably enough. The spirits of the dead liked attention, and for the *Bakra*— the white man—to come so often to his brother's bier was a compliment. We could return with him, but we must make haste—and it was evident that important ceremonies were about to take place.

REBEL DESTINY

688 Marowynse to earn money that he needed for marrying. He was in good health, and he learned about the river "so te—until . . ." he knew how to travel on the river safely. But after he had been away only a short time, word came to Kasanya's village that he was ill, and before he could be brought home, he died. They brought back his hair and nail clippings so that his spirit might rest among his own people. They held a big *dede wera*—wake—for him for six days in the village, with the little coffin and the offerings which were to accompany the spirit, and dancing and Anansi stories and the adji game, just as though he had died at home. There were many guns, too. Everything was done, and the spirit of the dead son was asked to help the family against the kunu which was brought to them by the deed of his mother's mother's brother.

[189] [224] The second son died in the bush. His own gun went off accidentally as he tripped on a hidden liana and killed him, though Kasanya had provided him with all the hunting obias a man would want, and he himself had a strong Kromanti spirit, so that no gun was supposed to have power to hurt him. The third was married when he died. His boat went over in the rapids. His body was never recovered.

782 "Tomorrow we shall all go and pray to the Mother of the River that she carry us well, that our journey be pleasant, that we reach the Granman's village safely. . . . There across the river is her shrine."

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- 761 It soon became clear that two things dominate the fore-  
776 ground of the spiritual life of the bush—death and kunu. In  
688 the last analysis, however, the two are perhaps but one  
force, for kunu slowly, inexorably, brings death to one  
member after another of the offender's kin, and it is largely  
the dead ancestors and the gods who are responsible for the  
meting out of kunu, in order that the ancient traditions  
and beliefs may go on. And so it was that daily, and many  
times daily, incidents not of our special seeking arose to  
document our knowledge of kunu.

[ 70 ]

# REBEL DESTINY

845 The women had spoken with greater and greater re-  
966 luctance about troubled births and now moved uneasily.

"You must not ask this," said Dida, rising. "Never talk about such things to young women."

Not until later, when Fenekonde and Tenemi were left alone with the white woman did they talk about birth customs again.

When a child died at birth, a hole was dug somewhere in the family quarter, or just outside it, and the child was buried there. There was no wake, no mourning. All those who had been living in the house where it died found other quarters, and for a month the house was washed with obia water. But if this had occurred before to the same mother, they would break the house where the child was born and would cast the pieces into the unhallowed bush. Some people on the river even broke it down at the first occurrence. There were never any wakes for very small children.

• 961 "Children die because they are bad spirits come in the  
845 form of a child. When they do not stay, we know it is a bad  
966 spirit. When the house is broken, they do not know their way to come again."

"What if a woman died?"

845 This was whispered so softly that only Fenekonde heard  
966 it, but she did not conceal her distaste for the question.

"When a woman dies she is put in a flat coffin. Some villages give her no coffin at all. Weeds are put into her eyes. All the girls in the village wash their eyes with obia weeds and water. They must never see this again. There is no wake. There is no dancing. No guns are shot. They break the house, and throw it after the coffin, as the men carry it away. She must not come back again."

But the white woman must not imagine that all deliveries were difficult. Often a woman bore a child, and, when the after-birth came, she herself rose and bathed and washed in pemba.

551 A child was given many names. Even in early childhood four or five names were not too many. There was the day

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123 Also, I am led to believe that for me they cherish a  
466 more than general respect, since already for ten years now they  
have been faithful workers for me, a privilege to which no  
inhabitant in this colony other than myself can lay claim.

123 A family among them, whose head recently died --  
771 according to their statements, through poisoning, which misdeed

• [761] is supposed to have taken place out of envy, since I gave him  
preference above others, which he deserved on account of his  
faithfulness and industry -- has built a hut in the vicinity of his  
[237] idol sign, in which they placed a crude image cut out of cedar-  
wood and painted with white paint. Beside that image they  
placed a little table and on it laid a number of quill feathers from  
the pouwies (38) a little bottle with black liquid, symbolizing ink,

1. A pheasant, the Crao alector L.

as well as some slips of paper. Near this little table they dug a  
number of steps into the ground, and at the lowermost step they  
made a gutter that runs in the direction of the river. Now when  
they have a festival with dancing and they want to pay respect  
to me, they place near it a number of children who constantly  
pour water brought in jugs, which, flowing down the steps into the  
gutter, streams riverward. While this ceremony takes place, songs  
in my honor are sung by the festive crowd.

[122]  
[829] Now the image, according to their conception, is sup-  
posed to be a representation of me, /36/ the white color the sign  
that I am a white, while the quills, paper, and ink are the attributes  
of the Whites' higher civilization, the streaming water that I stem  
from the colonists who have come here from across the sea.

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589 The wife of the headman referred to above came to me  
in the town shortly after the death of her husband and remained to  
choose my household as her permanent residence, to which I  
gladly consented. Faithful and considerate, she performs not only  
a great many household services, but even anticipates in this re-  
spect the wishes of my wife, and out of love for us refuses any  
monetary compensation.

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that he can protect himself only by submitting to the law of the group. In this doubtless must be seen the deep reason for the importance attached to death and mourning, events around which is centered the activity of the usual societies and which entail a veritable mobilization.

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It would be very difficult to condense the custom of the Refugee Blacks into a rigorous code. If one wished to do it, one would have to write as Article 1: "The living will conform to the will of the gods and the ancestors as it is expressed through the mouths of those possessed and by the movements of the bearers of the dead."

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Each one of the tribes of the Refugee Blacks is formed of a certain number of matrilineages.

There is no limit on the number of these lineages, and it can be asserted that if any lineage whatever, detached from another tribe, asks to live in the midst of the Boni, it will be welcomed. From the first generation the children consider themselves as Boni.

In this regard one can cite the example of the Awara Bakka 3 lineage and that of the small lineage founded in Boniville by a Djuka woman, wife of Grand Man Ochi. All her descendants consider themselves Boni. /64/

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But only the great lineages which constituted the tribe at its origin are social units recognized by the grand man, and only their heads are called to be members of the council.

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We shall study first the interior functioning of the lineage, then the institutions going beyond the framework of the lineages.

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554 The small, recently founded lineages attached to a lo each designate a head: for example, the Afi lineage has Awéni as head. But this head remains subject to the authority of the captain of the lo and his office has no official existence.

[787] /67/ The appointment is made by a council - kuutu - of the lineage, but it is not valid until endorsed by the grand man. When the deceased captain did not, while living, designate any successor, his yorka is interrogated in order to know whom he prefers. That does not have the force of law but can influence the council.

The council meets several days after the end of mourning for the deceased captain. All the male members of the lineage, regardless of age, give their opinion. Strictly speaking, they do not vote; but the nomination is considered valid only if three-quarters of those present are in agreement. If not, they disband without having decided anything, and the lineage can remain without a head for years. On this topic can be cited the example of the Awara Bakka lo, which remained without a head from 1935 (?) to 1953, until the appointment of Konduku. During this time the [643] grand man had designated Captain Popo, head of the Lapé lineage, to secure the interim. As for the religious functions, they were taken care of by the joyen of the lineage.

The captain has the following functions within the lineage:

[793] 1) He is priest of the ancestor worship and presides over the prayers and offerings made before the fraga tiki. In this duty [769] he is replaced in case of absence by the oldest man of the lineage.

• [761] In case of the death of a member of the lineage from the effect of the kuuu, the captain convokes all his people in order [782] to proceed to collective prayers and offerings intended to appease the gods:

/138 cont./

613 In general, one can say that the law of exogamy is main-  
614 tained firmly within the fractions which know completely their  
genealogy. Union between classificatory "brothers" and "sisters"  
belonging to different fractions remains always prohibited in  
principle, but as for all the institutions of the Refugee Blacks,  
the prohibition ceases to be observed if fear of suprahuman  
sanctions weakens. /139/

(1784) This is what explains the difference in attitude among the  
lineages. In the Awara Bakka lineage, people do not remember  
that marriages between fractions may have been followed by  
maladies or misfortunes, and for this reason they are no longer  
feared.

(1789) In the Kotika lineage it was the same, but an event which  
1784 took place in 1958 threw consternation. A young woman, Awini  
1761 (K1, E37, Boniville), died suddenly, and divination showed that  
she had been struck down by the kunu for having married her  
classificatory brother Sintamann (K3, E145, Boniville). However,  
they belonged to two different fractions and their common re-  
lationship was the farthest removed possible in the lineage  
(tenth-degree relatives).

684 Pikadu. The offense against exogamy. pikadu (1). Incest in the  
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1. This word appears to come  
from the Portuguese pecado, sin.

(114) broad sense, is considered an offense against society and against  
religious law; it exposes the lineage to the vengeance of the gods  
who exercise the kunu on it. But in the thought of the Refugee  
Blacks, if incest unleashes the functioning of existing kunu, it  
does not create new ones. What has been written on this subject  
by several authors seems inexact to us, at least for the Boni.

(1761) In the example put forth above Awini's death was attributed to  
the kunu brought to bear for a long time by the yarka of a man  
assassinated in former times by a member of the lineage.

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156 The Boni woman, poor in emotional feelings, and jealous of her independence with respect to men, puts her pride into subsisting by her own efforts.

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[156] The young women, even the ones with the freest habits, stay firmly attached to their village, to their plantings, and to the mode of life they received from their grandmothers. In fact, because of its structure and customs, the society of the Refugee Blacks has much less likelihood of suffering from the poisons spread by modern life than the patrilineal societies of Black Africa.

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#### Death; Burial Rites

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775 Death is for the Refugee Blacks an event of extreme gravity.

In order to ward off danger and permit the yorka of the dead person to take its place among the ancestors, the unstinting cooperation of everyone is required.

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[621] The ceremonies which have to do with death and mourning are by far the most important ones in the day-to-day life of the Refugee Blacks; for each one they represent a very heavy material load which is accepted without recriminations. It is really a veritable mobilization, which takes place within the framework of the village and not of the lineage. The apparatus set into motion is independent of the lineage, for it must function in the same way for an outsider, Djuka or Saramaka, who dies during a trip.

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767 Participation in the burial rites is for all an essential religious duty. From childhood the Boni are prepared for this task and become, some of them kisimɛ (coffin-makers), others ɔɔmɛ (grave-diggers), some others wasimɛ (bathers of the dead).

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767 Kisimɛ and ɔɔmɛ. It can be said that in each village, ɔɔmɛ and kisimɛ constitute customary societies, provided with an organization and wielding veritable powers for the duration of their work.

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[613] In principle the forward bearer (who is called bossman by analogy with a boat) must belong to the dead person's lineage. Apart from this restriction, the bearers can be (and are in fact) any people whatever, the only condition required being that they be extremely vigorous, because the load they carry is at the limit of their strength.

Fraud can exist in isolated cases, but in the great majority of cases there is no doubt as to the good faith of the bearers; they give contradictory answers, go ahead and back interminably, until, exhausted, they are raised up again by others. Actually, the interpretation of these automatic movements does not differ essentially from any process of divination.

[767] The dead person is interrogated from the age of four or five years up. If it is a very young child, he is not interrogated; but the causes of his death are sought by interrogating possessed people, and if there is reason to, the kunu is appeased in the same fashion.

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754 At the beginning of the interrogation the tribunal tries to make sure that the dead person was not a wisimā. After sending the bearers to the other end of the village, the president of the assemblage has two young men hidden in huts; then he has the bearers called, saying to the dead person: "I have lost So-and-so and So-and-so, find them." If the dead person was an upright man, he must have acquired a suprahuman clairvoyance permitting him to direct his bearers straight away toward the huts in question. If he was a wisimā, he will be as if blind; his bearers go wandering in vain from hut to hut.

They state that this test always succeeds.

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[784] The interrogation proceeds interminably. The causes of death are taken up. The first question is: is it a god who killed you? The answer is nearly always yes, and they proceed by elimination in order to arrive, for example, at learning that it is an Ampuku, that it is the Ampuku borne by So-and-so. By what the kunu was set in motion, how to appease it, is not the

764 /162 cont. /

787 business of the tribunal. The people of the dead person's lineage  
76 will have to settle that among themselves after the obsequies.  
[784] The role of the tribunal is to make official the cause of death  
and give it the force of law.

764 Then the inheritance is taken up in the presence of the  
787 near relatives of the dead man. The questions are asked suc-  
428 cessively: "To whom dost thou leave thy boat...?" "To whom  
dost thou leave thy gun (1)...?" The coffin moves each time

1. That, unless the dead man  
has, before his death, in front  
of witnesses, formally indicated  
the apportionment of his be-  
longings; in such a case, questions  
are asked only for the objects  
whose attribution had not been  
clearly specified.

toward one of the people present. /Figs. 22 and 23 appear here/

764 /163/ At the end of the third day after the death the  
[787] burial is prepared; the dead person is asked from daybreak on  
whether he is ready for that; if not it can be postponed until the  
next day.

[762] The ɔlɔnɔ have been working at the cemetery since the  
beginning of the day. They are young and strong men who have  
[827] to work slowly, for not a drop of sweat may fall into the grave  
or their akka would risk remaining prisoner in it.

About 4:00 P.M. the bearers promenade the dead person  
one last time in the village for a supreme adieu. The near  
relatives go to the wharf. The dead man is hoisted into a canoe  
[534] while the apinti drum calls his yorka so that it will not remain  
[775] in the village.

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764 The coffin is placed at the edge of the mortuary shed,  
787 the front turned toward the spectators. Agodéba sits down be-  
fore the front of the coffin. According to ceremony, he enters  
into contact with the /167/ yorka of the dead woman by pour-  
ing water on the ground before the coffin and calling her by  
name. He says the same sentences several times in different  
forms: "Thou hast lived here ... thou hast had children in this  
village; now death has killed thee. Thou must tell us who  
killed thee."

[292] Two men, B... (L'Enfant Perdu, Dipélu I) and A...  
(Asisi-Awara Bakka) come forward, gird their loins with a  
camisa, and, aided by several others, lift the coffin. B...,  
who is of the dead woman's lineage, takes the forward position.

For about ten minutes the two bearers try to put them-  
selves into a state of passivity permitting them to receive fitly  
the promptings of the dead woman; no question whatever is  
asked. They are seen to make contradictory movements, to  
go forward tilting the coffin from left to right, which means  
yes and no at the same time. Sometimes a sudden impulse  
appears to draw them far from the spectators, they are seen  
going from hut to hut, wheeling around, going away again.

Finally, they come back. Agodéba asks: "Is it a god who  
struck thee down?" The answer seems to be yes. "Is it a  
Papa gadu, an Ampuku, a Kāntasasu?" Contradictory answers,  
the people present lean toward the negative.

Agodéba continues: "Is it a yorka who killed thee?"  
Confused and contradictory movements of the coffin. Agodéba  
begins again: "Is it a god?" Someone among those present  
shouts: "Don't you see that she meant yes, speaking of the  
yorka? Agodéba gets angry, takes his hat, and leaves the  
meeting. General hubbub. Half an hour of words, broken by  
various movements and sham exits, is required in order to bring  
him to take his place again.

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761 The bearers are changed and the interrogation continues, still as confused as before. Captain Tafanié, who arrives in the midst of all this, thinks that the dead woman does not want to speak in front of such a large crowd. He asks her to designate which of the people present will form a small group. I see the front of the coffin stop in front of an old Saramaka named Yasu, then successively in front of about ten of those present of various ages and origins. They stand up, take their little benches in their hands, and go to join Tafanié under a large tree in a spot to the side; the interrogation resumes; by nightfall a sure fact has been established: Way was killed by a god. They will resume the next day in order to find out what god is concerned and how to appease him.

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[114] Notes taken at the funeral ceremonies for Kotoïda (Afi lineage) October 22-23, 1956 (2nd and 3rd days after death).

I arrive at Asisi on the 22nd at eight o'clock. Kotoïda died on the twentieth; the first part of the ceremony has been finished.

[692] It is Tafanié, head of Papaïston village, who presides over the lānti kuutu.

Tafanié himself has directed the making of the coffin (he is a kisimā) with the help of boards held in reserve on the spot. The work was finished at nine o'clock in the morning.

The body was placed in the coffin immediately, and after the presentation of the pieces of cloth, the wings were nailed. /168/

When I arrive at the wharf, the coffin is placed in the mortuary shed. The near relatives of the deceased (sons, daughters, and nephews) as well as the husband and the co-wife compelled to take part in the mourning are seated in their hammocks attached to the posts of the shed. The first-mentioned manifest no apparent sorrow whatever. Husband and

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764 co-wife, on the contrary, are completely veiled and show by their state of prostration the keenest sorrow. Each of them is assisted by a female relative who supports them when they have to move somewhere else, for they are supposed to be too overcome to move alone.

764 The interrogation as to the causes of death has already  
787 taken place the day before, but Tafanié proclaims, in front of  
761 me, the result of it to the latest arrivals: the deceased was struck down by a yorka which pursues the lineage with its kunu. She had already received several warnings in the form of illness; the yorka had demanded a payment which she and her near relatives had neglected to furnish. Impossible to learn anything further before being able to interrogate this yorka, whose habitual bearer has left for Saint-Laurent. It is necessary to wait for his return in order to mollify the yorka's anger.

764 About ten o'clock the members of the lānti kunu go toward the fraga tiki of the Awara Bakka lo, in front of which they  
769 all sit down on their stools. I notice that not a single man of  
778 the dead person's lineage appears in the front row. In it I  
[613] recognize Popo (Lapé), Poopu (Dipélu II, Kormotibo), Tafanié (Papaïston). The one who is speaking is a foreigner passing through, a very aged and respected Djuka.

[782] The elders invoke Masa Gadu and the ancestors in general, asking them to protect them from adversity in the future; then the offering of water and tafia takes place (no cane juice). I notice that a little is poured on each of the secondary fraga tiki erected for the sake of each one of the ancestors who pursue another lineage with their kunu. That lasts about a quarter of an hour.

764 Next someone goes to ask the deceased to whom she  
787 bequeaths the Papa gadu god which manifested itself in her;  
776 for the gods are bequeathed like the rest of the inheritance,  
428 even if those concerned are divinities which exercise the kunu  
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Cemeteries. There are two cemeteries in Boni country: one on the lands of the Dikan lineage for the people living on the French bank, the other downstream from Kotika for the inhabitants of that village. They are ordinary places which nothing indicates from the bank, for they are covered like the rest of the country by secondary forest. The dead are buried there in graves aligned parallel to the river, about seven meters apart. The dead are placed with heads turned toward the river. No separation by lineage exists within the cemetery.

The graves are not marked by any decoration, and at the end of about ten years, the mound having settled down, no trace of the burial remains.

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The graves are never cleaned. Only the ɔlɔmɔ heads, who have received special instruction, know the graves of the principal chiefs and the boundaries of the cemetery.

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The Boni never go to the cemetery alone and do not make offerings on the graves of their near relatives. Someone who would frequent the cemetery alone would be suspected of being a wisimɔ seeking to capture the yɔrka of a dead person.

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Even if they are right near the villages, cemeteries are never connected directly to them by paths, and the dead are transported by boat. By proceeding thus they hope to isolate the villages from evil influences.

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If someone dies by drowning, he is buried away from the cemetery. According to Mr. W. F. van Lier, among the Djuka all drowned persons are supposed to have been victims of a kunu; the Boni do not have this conception and declare that they have lost the meaning of this custom; one notices, however, that they observe mourning for the drowned according to the usual rites.

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Relations between Gods and Men

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The kunu

• [753]  
[761] The kunu. The Refugee Blacks call kunu the collective curse which has weighed on a matrilineage since an ancient offense. The kunu is without time limit, without pardon, without pity, blind in the choice of its victims; in principle, it can end only with the complete extermination of the lineage. Each time that adversity swoops down on one of its members in the form of death, sickness, various calamities, the kunu is the most frequently obtained explanation. The instrument of this inexpiable vengeance is either a god or the yorka (spirit) of a dead person.

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This notion, which occupies a central position in the beliefs of the Refugee Blacks, does not appear to have been borrowed directly. Most of the populations of Dahomey /222/ and the Ivory Coast take for granted the idea of arbitrary punishments exercised upon the members of the lineage by the gods or the ancestors of the group. But no population of these regions has, to our knowledge, developed so highly systematized a doctrine.

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The conceptions developed by the Refugee Blacks, divinities impelled exclusively by vengeance, and especially ancestors inexorably chastising lineages other than their own, have created new relationships among individuals and among lineages.

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We have not been able to elucidate the origin of the word kunu. Perhaps it is a deformation of the Mina word ekunu, which means burial.

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Three categories of divinities can pursue men with their kunu, and because of this fact the Refugee Blacks feel toward them an extreme terror mixed with veneration.

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The various works treating of the Refugee Blacks point out well the importance of the kunu, but it seems to us that the functioning of this institution (for in fact a social institution is certainly concerned here) has not been clearly understood.

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A kunu is attached to a matrilineage in the literal sense (bas). It extends obligatorily to all the members of the matrilineage and can strike only them.

For example, my kunu can strike my sister's son but not my wife nor my children (they are subject to the kunu of their own lineage). /223/

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The kunu, striking the lineage as a whole, can be appeased only by prayers uniting (at least in principle) the whole lineage. That is the respect in which the kunu may be defined as a social institution, for it is, we shall see, the principal cement holding the groups together.

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The unleashing of a kunu does not necessarily and immediately follow the destruction of a territory or the death of a dagowe snake. The god thus offended avenges itself by making a certain number of members of the lineage sick and by causing limited misfortunes to happen. When things are at that point the kunu can still be exorcised by prayers and offerings. In 1957 the beginning of a kunu was manifesting itself thus in the Awara Bakka lineage of Asisi; very frightened, the members of the lineage made offerings and prayers to exorcise it.

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But if the lineage people neglect the warnings of the god, if through laziness or selfishness too great a number of them are absent from the collective prayers and do not take part in the offerings, prayers and offerings will be refused and the god will kill one of them. From then on the kunu is unleashed and can no longer leave the lineage. Its involuntary bearer will have to bequeath it upon his death to a member of the lineage, who cannot refuse this legacy and must immediately

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784 One sees from this example how the influence of women,  
613 exerted in arbitrary fashion, in a domain placed outside of  
787 custom and ordinary social life, weighs on the life of the  
562 group.

774 Kunu of the Dipélu lineage. The situation of the Dipélu  
614 lineage with respect to the kunu is particularly interesting.  
571 Although split for perhaps 100 years into two separate groups,  
Dipélu I (L'Enfant Perdu and Apatu villages) and Dipélu II  
(Kormotibo and Asisi-Dip. II villages), this group still constitutes  
an undivided unit with respect to the kunu. Neither time nor  
[484] distance (it takes more than a week of traveling to make the  
round trip between L'Enfant Perdu and Apatu) has been able to  
break it up. The Apatu people come very often (at least some  
[755] of them) to be present at the collective prayers which take  
place at L'Enfant Perdu to appease a kunu in order to cure a  
sick person.

724 The oldest kunu ("since Africa") is that of a Papa gadu  
614 god whose bearer was O Dika (Dip. I, D10, †1951) and which  
226 passed after her death into O Pééchina (Dip. I, E42, L'Enfant  
[787] Perdu village). This kunu strikes indiscriminately the people  
of L'Enfant Perdu, Apatu, Kormotibo, Asisi-Dip. II, and the  
Dipélu fraction residing in Boniville. To it, these past years,  
[761] have been attributed the death of O Way (Dip. I, E6, living  
[753] in Boniville), the illness of Δ Akwali (Dip. II, F7, Kormotibo  
village) and of O Bongo (same village).

724 Another very old kunu is the one exercised by the yorka  
775 of a Surinam Creole who had settled with the Dipélu people a  
614 very long time ago. He was suspected of sorcery and killed.  
[643] Since then his yorka comes back regularly to exterminate the  
Dipélu.

/225 cont. /

784 Having no known lineage (his family, if he had any, was  
786 in Surinam), it had taken people of the Dipélu lineage as  
614 bearers. The last was  $\Delta$  Denis  $\dagger$  in 1938. Since Denis'  
707 death, it no longer has a bearer. The questioning of the dead  
reveals that they died by its kunu. The members of the two  
[782] fractions of the lineage meet together (at least two or three  
members of each village come) to supplicate it.

784 A third kunu, very interesting in origin and supposed  
614 action, /226/ in 1957 was borne by Kwau (Dip. I, E1, Kotika  
village). It results from the killing of an anaconda snake by  
Apatu  $\dagger$  (Dip. I, C1), companion of the explorer Crevaux  
when he was traveling to /in/ Brazil. Upon contact with  
Europeans Apatu had become a freethinker and was no longer  
observing the laws of his people. Among the later victims of  
[753] this kunu was counted Kwami (Dip. II, F4, Kormotibo village)  
[755] who, gravely ill, had had to go to L'Enfant Perdu where the  
god had been invoked for him and offerings made. The death  
of Manga (Dip. I, E5, Boniville,  $\dagger$  about 1930) was particu-  
larly attributed to it.

[761] No other kunu has revealed itself in Apatu village since  
its founding in 1882.

784 A fourth kunu concerning all the Dipélu has as bearers  
614 women of the Dipélu II group. It results from the inadvertent  
706 murder of a Papa gadu whose bearer was a dagowe snake killed  
787 in the course of the nivrée /fishing/ of a pool by Akonté  
522  $\dagger$  (Dip. II, B1), transmitted to Kondo  $\dagger$ , then to Alama  
(Dip. II, E1).

Since then Papa gadu have revealed themselves in  
○ Apatu (Dip. II, F9, Kormotibo village) and in ○ Kaala  
(Dip. II, G28, Asisi-Dip. II village). They declared them-  
selves to be the descendants of the first and to come in support  
of it.

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They are the object of three kunu:

--One exercised by a Papa gadu god whose bearer up into 1956 was Kotoïda († Oct. 1956), who bequeathed it to O Mani (Afi lineage, d12).

784 --The other exercised by a yorka of the Lapé lineage.  
775 This kunu dates from about 60 years ago; Alémin (Afi lineage,  
613 b3, Kormotibo village), 80 years old in 1957, had when he

[787] was young cut a clearing in a place which was found to be an old abandoned Boni cemetery (opposite Maripasoula). Some time afterward, a yorka revealed itself in a woman of the Lapé lineage, saying that it was exercising a kunu against the family of the sacrilegious person.

• [761] It is to this yorka, whose bearer is M... (L2, Boniville), that the death of Kotoïda in October, 1956 is especially attributed.

[684] --A third kunu is exercised by A..., of the Papaïston 2 lineage. A... had committed pikadu. Surprised by Alémin (Afi lineage), he had paid the latter to obtain his silence.

[762] But Alémin had talked. Dishonored, A... committed suicide with a gunshot; some time afterward his yorka revealed itself in Alémin; it exercises a kunu on this lineage.

613 Situation of the other lineages with respect to the kunu. The  
614 Papaïston lineage is divided into two groups: Papaïston 1 (the  
784 principal one) and Papaïston 2, of which there remain only three living members: two women and one young man. This remainder of a lineage continues to bear its own kunu, which is unique and separate from that of the principal group.

The principal group forms a unit with respect to the kunu.

[114] The Lapé lineage, cut from the point of view of genealogy into two pieces, forms a unit with respect to the kunu. We have been able to collect only fragmentary information on the various kunu of this village.

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A kunu is exercised by a Dipélu yarka, borne in 1958 by a Loka woman. It is invoked before the fraga tiki of l'Enfant Perdu village (Dipélu I). Sometimes a broko dè is celebrated for it in the same forms as the ceremony of the eighth day after death.

We have likewise not been able to collect complete information on the kunu of the Kotika lineage. This lineage, divided into three fractions, forms a unit with respect to the kunu.

A kunu is exercised by the yarka of a Surinam Creole assassinated in former times by a member of the lineage. Its bearer in 1958 was Todo (K1, E68), a man of the Kotika living in Boniville. In 1958 a young woman of the lineage, Awini (K1, E37), died suddenly; the yarka revealed that it had struck Awini because she had a liaison with Sintamann (K3, E145), thus committing pikadu. The idea of the collective responsibility of the lineage is so deeply accepted by the Boni that the near relatives of the dead woman did not reproach Sintamann at all.

/229/ A yarka of the Kotika lineage may exercise a kunu on the Djuka. This is the case of an affair going back to 1950; a young woman died some time after having a serious discussion with a Djuka woman who had hit her. Deaths among the Djuka these last years had been attributed to its vengeance.

It seems that there is no other kunu exercised by a Djuka upon a Boni lineage and vice versa. This is surprising, considering the fights which in former times set the two nations against each other.

The Djuka and Saramaka living isolated in the midst of the Boni know their kunu, which were revealed to them in childhood. In case of sickness, they employ divinatory procedures in order to know what kunu is concerned, then they make offerings. But in case of serious illness, they are forced to go back to the village of origin of their lineage.

/230 cont. /

784 the lineage; questioned, this god declared that it had something  
787 to complain about in the bad condition of the house which the  
776 members of the lineage had erected to it on its order; the roof  
of leaves had not been changed and it was raining through.

784 It happens also, but as an exception, that the god has  
684 sanctioned an offense against morals or more precisely, against  
the social law, such as the breaking of an interdiction, pikadu  
(incest in the wider sense, an offense against exogamy). It  
is necessary to understand that in the thought of the Refugee  
Blacks, incest unleashes the existing kunu but does not create  
a new kunu.

787 In October, 1952, Dolo, a young man of 25 of the  
761 Awara Bakka lo, died almost suddenly. Divination revealed  
613 that he had been killed by the kunu (it was a Papa gadu which  
had intervened) in order to sanction an offense committed  
some time previously by another member of the lo named P....  
The latter, a notoriously depraved individual, had committed  
incest with his own sister.

784 When the divinity has made known through the mouth  
776 of its bearer the causes of its act, the assembled members of  
782 the lineage implore it, ask it not to pursue its vengeance; the  
787 divinity then requires an offering: for example, if it is a  
Papa gadu, it will require bottles of beer, some red and white  
cloth which will be immersed in a given place in the river.  
It may also require dances in its honor, celebrated by the  
other possessed people in the village. If it is an Ampuku, it  
will demand rum, dark-blue cloth which will be exposed in  
a remote place in the forest. An offering of this kind repre-  
sents a relatively small sum, even for the Boni (several  
thousand francs in 1952). The god then declares itself appeased.  
But it does not pardon and it will resume /231/ its vengeance  
at the first cause. Thus the Boni have hope only in a rigorous  
observance of customary law and the rites. There are divinities  
which appeared to be thus appeased for a long time and to

/231 cont. /

776 which people do not hesitate to come to ask for remedies or  
787 opinions, in spite of the evil they have done to the lineage and  
perhaps will do tomorrow. It is even allowable to wonder  
whether people do not prefer to consult the most wicked  
divinities, for they are believed to be stronger.

784 The kunu focuses, turns aside toward high purposes the  
791 blind forces of superstition, fear, and rancor. Several authors  
114 who have written on the Refugee Blacks have stated that  
754 calamities were almost unfailingly attributed to sorcery (wisi).  
This is a grave error due to the fact that they believed they  
could transpose to the Refugee Blacks what is observed among  
the Creole populations of Surinam. If this were true, no

[787] positive social bond could exist. We believe we can assert  
that among the Refugee Blacks divination lays the blame on  
sorcery in only scarcely a tenth of the misfortunes. Here,  
784 among other examples, are several typical cases concerning  
[114] Boni who worked with us or whom we have known especially  
well:

[753] --In 1948, Fintiman (Dju) falls ill (violent pains in the  
[776] legs); kunu of a Kintamasu.

[752] --In 1948, Galmo (Papalston) is accidentally hurt (gun  
backfire); kunu.

[753] --In 1949, Diolè, captain of the Dju lo, is smitten with  
[761] hemiplegia and remains paralyzed. He dies in 1951: kunu  
[776] of a Papa gadu.

761 --In 1950, a Saramaka is killed in a hunting accident  
(a gun in poor condition went off by itself): 3-gu 7-gu (accident).

[754] --In 1951, Kanayen (Kotika) drowns while sailing at  
night on the river: wisi.

[784] --In 1951, Loka (Dju) dies at the age of 70: kunu of an  
[776] Ampuku.

752 --In 1951, F... (Dju) is seriously hurt by the falling of  
784 a branch while cutting his clearing: kunu of a yorka.  
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/231 cont./

--In 1952, Dolo (Awara Bakka) dies almost all of a sudden with the symptoms of peritonitis: kunu, punishment for incest committed by another member of the lineage.

--In 1952, Maïendo, ten years old, son of Osaya (Awara Bakka) accidentally drowns: natural accident (Bag-zoku).

--In 1954, Béniti (Dju) dies at nearly 75 years of age: kunu of a Papa gadu.

--In 1954, Agyémési (Aw.B.) dies almost all of a sudden: killed by Odun (he was a wisimé).

--In 1955, Tabiki (Awara Bakka) dies at over 80: natural illness.

--In 1955, Kotoida Aic (Afi lineage) dies suddenly, aged about 50: kunu of a yeka.

--In 1957, F... (Lapé) is gravely ill with symptoms of typhoid: kunu of a Papa gadu.

--In 1957, Sokodo (Dip. II) dies at 40: kunu of a Kintamasu.

/232/ One observes that in the 15 cases cited here, the kunu interferes ten times, while in three cases natural causes: illness, accident, were assumed.

In reality, the Refugee Blacks do not have the conception of a natural world, subject to known or knowable laws, which is set against a supernatural world. The intervention of a Papa gadu is neither more nor less natural than an illness or an accident. There is only, on the plane of human life, more or less frequent intervention by suprahuman forces.

The intervention of these forces is made according to laws which embrace the totality of beings and things, laws which men cannot understand but of which they believe they have a partial and empirical knowledge.

7232 cont. /

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It is important not to confuse the kumu with the sufferings which other divinities can arbitrarily make men undergo. The kumu has a systematic character. But a divinity theoretically beneficent, and which has come into a man after being called on, may also from time to time bring misfortunes if such is its whim of the moment.

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In 1949, G... (Dju) was busy cooking a crab in the house of his mother D... A machete which was fastened to the wall suddenly detached itself and wounded him in the right hand. Now ~~his~~ mother had an Ampuku which had imposed the crab on her as kina. This Ampuku, immediately called on, revealed that it really was it which had struck G..., for it did not like to see D... 's son eat crab (note that G... was not at all held to the observance of this kina, for no kina is transmitted from mother to son).

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Neither must the kumu exercised by a yarka be confused with the vengeance that a dead person can exercise against the members of his own lineage in order to punish them for having neglected their duties.

Punishment inflicted by an ancestor of the lineage seems for the Boni to be a notion distinct from that of the kumu. Vengeance exercised by a yarka upon its own lineage is regarded as exceptional and devoid of the inexorable and definitive character of the kumu, but they assume it to be possible. They cited to us the case of Yali (Loka), who committed suicide when accused of sorcery by the people of his lineage. Since then, his yarka has caused sicknesses and deaths in his own village.

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[761]  
Conversely, a god which exercises the kumu upon a lineage may in certain cases intervene in favor of this lineage if such is its whim of the moment. Thus the death of Diamanti (Aw. B. 2, Asisi village, † in 1955) is attributed to the god which exercises the kumu on the village of L'Enfant Perdu and whose bearer was Pécchini. Diamanti had wronged someone of this village and the god had intervened against her.

784 /233 cont./ One conceives of The  
795 interminable dimensions which this situation entails: if the  
613 manifestations of the kuny do not cease, the victims let it be  
578 understood that the prayers were badly made. . . . /Figure 28  
appears here. /

761 Every suspicious death whose circumstances lead to the  
628 belief that /234/ an inhabitant of another village was responsi-  
613 ble can bring on a punitive expedition against that village and  
784 other villages of the same kin group. By taking this vengeful  
attitude even before the grand man has been notified and the  
blamed people heard, the people of the dead person's lineage  
are thinking above all else of taking precautions against the  
action of the dead person, who could turn back his vengeance  
against them. Actually, these fights are above all symbolic;  
the wisdom of the Refugee Blacks has promulgated precepts  
which many nations could take as a pattern, in order that these  
punitive expeditions might not have serious consequences:

--One may strike only with the fist, and blood must not  
flow;

--Men may strike only men, while the women find fault  
with women;

--One may fight only on the village common and before  
witnesses, never in the bush or on the river. As a general  
rule, the people aimed at by the expedition do not resist, but  
flee into the bush or on the boats, or group themselves around  
the fraga tiki, holy place which the aggressors must respect.

628 We have told about the expedition made in April, 1957  
613 by the people of Asisi-Awara Bakka against the villages of  
L'Enfant Perdu (Dipélu I) and Kormotibo (Dipélu II). Eight  
years earlier, in 1949, another squabble had thrown the Dipélu  
against the Awara Bakka after the death of Pétilona (Dip. II),  
whom her husband Bofo had taken to Surinam and who had  
died there. The Kormotibo people claimed that Bofo was  
responsible for her death. They went to attack the people of  
Asisi who, although three times more numerous, did not try

791 /237 cont. /

683 Not just anyone may resort to divination on behalf of  
883 someone else: only the eldest have the right to do it, and it  
has happened that the grand man punished offenders severely.

797 Fate. The Refugee Blacks do not attribute all misfortunes  
[752] to suprahuman causes. They have the notion of natural accident,  
[761] ɔŋɔɔku. They say ɔŋɔɔku miti mi, or again ogi miti mi,  
misfortune met me. They also accept the idea of natural death.  
They usually regard as natural death that of the very old, the  
infirm from birth, and sickly children.

[787] Divination blames fate in ten to 20 per cent of accidents.  
[792] It is the usual explanation for hunting accidents.

792 /238/ Magic Forces

As we have shown, the Refugee Blacks consider beings  
and things as a world of forces capable of acting on one another,  
outside of time and space, according to laws which men can-  
not understand but of which they believe they have a partial  
and empirical knowledge transmitted by tradition since the  
754 time of the ancestors. They distinguish negative magic forces,  
789 wisi, which have the effect of diminishing the vital force of  
men, which makes them sick or kills them, and positive magic  
forces, ɔbia, which come from the gods: the ɔbia comes to  
increase the vital force of men, giving them protection, im-  
munity, or knowledge. But no power is in essence a principle  
of good or evil; nothing is impossible for him who knows the  
formulas; this is why the magic of the Refugee Blacks is reduced  
to a perpetual and indecisive struggle between ɔbia and wisi.

754 Wisi. Wisi is sorcery in the African sense of the term, that is,  
[673] the use of magic procedures to harm others; wisi is for the  
Refugee Blacks the pre-eminently criminal act, at the same  
time against morals and against society. The struggle against

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In 1958, a Boniville woman, N..., was convicted of having paid a Creole quimboiseur to make the grand man die. She confessed, a rare thing in this kind of case, and the materiality of the facts did not appear doubtful. The Boni were strongly impressed by this unprecedented event, and for several weeks the members of the lineage concerned were in such agitation that one could have believed they had lost their reason. In Boniville they "held court" continually for nearly two months, and they discussed so much that farm work was neglected and part of the rice crop lost.

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What were they going to do with this woman? The laws of Odun forbade killing her, no more could she be expelled. The Boni made discreet overtures to the administration to find out whether it was not possible to have her imprisoned. They were surprised to learn that French law does not recognize the offense of sorcery. Somebody then proposed having her admitted as a servant at the leprosarium of the Acarouani on the /245/ coast. This suggestion produced a surprising result; the Boni were unanimous in thinking that making someone who was not a leper live in a leprosarium was a punishment worse than death, and they resolved to pardon her.

How does one go about it, since the laws of Odun do not permit pardoning a wisim? Nobody could give us a satisfactory justification on this, but in 1959 A..., the preceding year spurned and maltreated, had taken up normal living again in her village.

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In fact, a case of wisi is terminated only upon the death of the person concerned. If a man who has been accused of wisi during his lifetime dies accidentally, or is struck by a fulminating sickness, the fact that he has been chastised by Odun appears as incontestable proof. The case is fixed in the memory of the group in a specific form and will be given as an example to inspire respect for customary law.

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[272] 7246 cont. /

of his near relatives, his sister's children being regarded as the victims most pleasing to the demon.

Although in former times one to two out of ten deaths were attributed to wisi, in 1957 and 1958 out of 14 adult deaths of which we could obtain the explanation, there were:

[184] --Four wisim killed by Odu, including two women of over 85 who during their lifetime had never been the object of unfavorable notice;

[24] --One death by the action of a wisim, or a total of more than a third of the deaths; out of the nine others, two were looked upon as natural deaths (dead of old age), seven were attributed to the kumi.

754  
648 The Refugee Blacks and Creole magic. Some of them go to get from the lukum what their own social morals forbid: vengeance or success acquired at the expense of other people. They have uttered an oath that prohibits the practice of wisi: for most of them it is clear that if they paid a playeur /magician, sorcerer/ to harm someone, it would be the same as if they performed the sorcery themselves. But others make a mental reservation on this point.

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648 In 1951, G..., of the Kotika lo, then about 20 years old, felt ill while staying at Saint Laurent. He went to find a Creole mal.tif (clairvoyant) who presented him with a mirror, announcing to him that he was going to see in it the face of the one who had playé /bewitched, cast a spell on/ him. G... saw nothing in the mirror. The mal.tif was not upset at this and revealed to him that the playeur must be someone in his wife's family. G... then recalled a dispute he had had some time previously with one of his wife's brothers and let himself be convinced: since that day he has not gotten along with his brother-in-law.

/253 cont. /

Various Beliefs

578 Fyo-fyo. If a Boni is on bad terms with someone of his lineage or of another lineage, he has the absolute right to turn a cold shoulder to him and stop having anything to do with him. But if, hiding his rancor, he seeks, from selfish motives, to maintain the appearance of friendly relations, he risks falling ill, being struck by various calamities, or even dying from the effect of what the Refugee Blacks call a fyo-fyo. The nature of this force is not clear; they know only that its support is a small, common insect named fyo-fyo. They declare that if a person dies from the consequences of a fyo-fyo, one of these insects will be seen leaving his body through the nose at the moment of death.

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[725] Taku sani. By this name the Refugee Blacks designate maleficent entities of the bush, which they imagine as of nonhuman nature by contrast to the taku yaka, wandering spirits of dead people rejected by society. These entities are lower beings devoid of consciousness but dangerous for men into whom they may enter, rendering them sick or mad. Certain of these entities are believed to reside in plants, like the kotkoti, others are thought to take on the appearance of dwarfs (baku), whom certain people believe they sometimes see at dawn on the outskirts of villages.

751 One protects oneself against taku sani by special obia, and those who do not feel completely secure take a certain number of precautions in addition, like that of tearing up the leaves they have used for drinking water from creeks.

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613 When twins die young people almost always blame a disagreement which has arisen in the lineage. The twins did not want to live in a disunited family. The head of the lineage then exhorts his people to be reconciled with one another at any cost in order to avoid new misfortunes (1).

[153]

1. In general they have the idea that dimensions occurring in the lineage have as a consequence illnesses or misfortunes striking the members of the lineage.

[182]

This notion plays a major role in the social life of the Refugee Blacks; after the kunu, it is the principle cement holding groups together.

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One who harms a twin is sure to fall ill. Conversely, it is assumed that the twin must not abuse his power, that he must lead an upright life and avoid quarrels. He is nearer to God than other men.

They assume for example that Efa, of Papalson village, herself a twin and the mother of twins, has a very special power. Nobody would risk harming her.

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In lineages having many twins there exists a place of worship sacred to a vital principle called Twilenge. The nature of this principle is not clear. The Boni define it as the soul of twins. Is it a matter of the first twins Adam and Eve? Or of a collective worship offered up to all deceased twins?

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[765] audience and to create an atmosphere of participation in the  
rite.

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[765] This ritual character makes it so that the Anansi Toli  
cannot be recited any time and in any old way. The story-  
teller may speak only at night, in the presence of a respondent  
and of an audience of at least two or three persons. A ritual  
formula: "dirinti" -- the response of the audience: "ndaeti,"  
precedes each new story. It is only with extreme repugnance  
that informants consent to listen to and comment in the day-  
time on a tale recorded on tape, particularly if their parents  
are still living, for it is said among the Refugee Blacks as in  
Black Africa that telling stories in full daylight makes one's  
father and mother die.

[174]  
[177] These tales belong to an authentically African  
accumulated store, practically unchanged in spite of the  
borrowing from the Creole Blacks of Paramaribo of several  
themes concerning automobiles, steamboats, etc., inserted  
in droll fashion into the traditional themes.

[225] The usual hero of these tales is Anansi, the crafty one.  
Anansi is the name of the Mygale spider (1). It is noteworthy.

[91] 1. The spider cycle is  
characteristic of the Akan  
(Agni-Baoulé-Abron)  
culture area. Anansi is the  
name of the Mygale spider  
among the Agni.

however, that this spider does not appear to play any special  
role in the beliefs of the Refugee Blacks and that no divinatory  
power is attributed to it. In fact, in the tales of which he is  
the hero, Anansi is nearly always represented as a man.

/294 cont. /

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It seems that in these relations, both bring more patience and tolerance to bear than toward the people of their own group. It is excessively rare to see disputes arise between Indians and Boni, when there sometimes are some within each group.

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The feelings which the Boni have toward the Indians are complex: they feel superior in physical strength, effectiveness, and organization; they make fun of the Indians' puerile eagerness for beads and jewelry, of the begging attitude of certain ones among them. But they admire them for their cleverness,

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their intimate knowledge of the forest, and fear them for the supernatural powers they attribute to them. Sure of themselves, fearing nothing from the bush, never getting lost, unrivalled hunters and fishermen, the Indians appear to them to be endowed with unique faculties which other men do not possess. We have happened to hear in camp reflections such as this: "It is going to rain, the Indians are making shacka."

829

152

The Boni feel an intense fear of Indian magic. Not one of them would dare to seriously displease an Indian, and even if he feels he has been wronged, in most cases he will not dare complain (1).

• 761  
787  
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1. In the search for the magic causes of death, it happens that divination may incriminate the action of an Indian medicine man. In such a case the legal action of the Boni is extinguished, for the principle is that the Indian medicine man does not hurt anyone without a reason. It is considered that the deceased must have gravely injured him and that he deserved his fate.